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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 07 BRUSSELS 003128

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DEA HQS FOR A, AD, OC, OE, SOD (MALTZ, CRAINE);
STATE FOR INL/FO, INL/PC, EUR/ERA, L/LEI;
JUSTICE FOR CRIMINAL DIVISION, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL
AFFAIRS,
DIR ONDCP FOR DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF SUPPLY REDUCTION;
ROME FOR DEA (BENSEN);
KABUL FOR DCM, DEA (BALBO), POL, NAS

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SUBJECT: DEA ADMINISTRATOR DISCUSSES AFGHANISTAN DRUG
SITUATION WITH EUROPEAN UNION OFFICIALS

Classified By: COUNSELOR FOR INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS AND
LAW ENFORCEMENT AFFAIRS JAMES P. MCANULTY FOR REASONS
IN SECTIONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

¶ 1. (C) Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator Karen Tandy discussed the drug situation in Afghanistan with Commission, Council Secretariat, and Political and Security Committee (PSC) Ambassadors during her September 30 to October 2 visit to Brussels. She emphasized close links between drug traffickers and insurgents and provided details on USG efforts to promote Afghanistan capabilities in investigating and prosecuting drug traffickers. She and her U.S. colleagues encouraged EU policy makers to expand police training and mentoring in Afghanistan, particularly in the provinces. EU colleagues showed considerable interest in these developments. The EU Police Training Advisor committed to deploy qualified police trainers to provinces once officials resolve "challenges" related to their basing and support at Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) locations.
END SUMMARY.

PROGRESS ON COUNTER-DRUG INVESTIGATIONS

¶ 2. (C) At a breakfast meeting hosted by the Ambassador October 2 in her honor, the DEA Administrator briefed EU officials on DEA counter-drug efforts in Afghanistan. EU officials included a broad mix of Commission and Council Secretariat policy makers and program officers involved with drug issues, police training, and transatlantic relations. Attendees from the Commission included Director for Asia James Moran, Deputy Head of Unit for Drugs Coordination Francisco Bataller Martin, Policy Officer Caroline Hager, and Afghanistan International Relations Officer Paul Turner, while participants from the Council Secretariat included Head of Police Unit Stefan Feller, Principal Administrator for Justice and Home Affairs Wouter van de Rijt, Administrator for Transatlantic Relations Dr. Christiane Hoehn, and Political Advisor Olivia Holdsworth. (Separately, Administrator Tandy had met with PSC Ambassadors from six Member States -- the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Romania,

Lithuania, and Estonia. Please see paragraph 19.) Tandy, who had just returned from her fourth or fifth trip to Afghanistan during her four-year tenure as Administrator, said she sensed great progress in certain sectors, while, at the same time, witnessing greater challenges. During the past two years, Afghanistan had approved and signed into law counter-drug legislation and established a counter-narcotics tribunal. As recently as 2004, the country had no real courts or jails, and suffered from thoroughly corrupt law enforcement entities. The Central Narcotics Tribunal, Criminal Justice Task Force, and associated judges, prosecutors, and investigators, represented a real "enclave" of justice practitioners in the country, with vetted personnel who could issue search and arrest warrants and remain shielded from retaliation by traffickers. That Afghanistan could replicate a justice system in this specialized sector in such a short span was "nothing short of amazing." To date, officials had prosecuted over 1,700 drug traffickers, achieving a conviction rate of 90 percent. The Task Force had suffered no losses, which represented "no small feat" as well.

DEA SERVING AS MENTORS AND "ENABLERS"

¶3. (C) The Administrator explained that the DEA presence had grown from virtually no permanent presence in 2003 to some 25 personnel, including permanently-assigned and temporary-duty personnel, today. DEA agents worked closely with Afghan counterparts in National Interdiction Units (NIUs) as on-the-job mentors and "enablers." DEA trained Afghan police in two broad bands involving investigations and enforcement operations. To date, some 40 operations have taken place.

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These extremely successful operations have witnessed, in addition to seizures primarily of drugs, such as opium and heroin, seizures of heavy munitions, sophisticated surface-to-air missiles, rocket propelled grenades, other types of weaponry, and even army uniforms, in addition to the drugs. Through use of human intelligence sources throughout the country and tribes, and signals intelligence, DEA officials have become convinced that "no daylight" exists between drug traffickers at the highest level and Taliban insurgents. In many cases, they are the same persons. More than ever, DEA has aligned its intelligence and coordinated operations with International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through the embedding of DEA agents with military units around the country. Currently, the highest-value traffickers, burgeoning opium crops, and the Taliban are concentrated in the south. "They are together."

STRONG LINKS BETWEEN TRAFFICKERS AND INSURGENTS

¶4. (C) Tandy cited an instance in which an informant with a hidden microphone recorded the conversations of nine Taliban members and eleven drug traffickers during a meeting at a bazaar in Nangarhar. According to the resulting transcript, participants discussed "jihad," movement of insurgents to Pakistan for training, military operations, and division of their collective responsibilities for providing funds to support "jihad" activities. They even discussed how much to pay a corrupt employee at Jalilabad Air Base who reported on movements of military helicopters. The meeting basically involved a "fund-raising dinner." Various items seized during drug raids provided further evidence of this inter-connection between drug traffickers and insurgents. After a British Task Force raided a drug lab, DEA agents exploited materials found at the site, which included a Taliban Training Manual. The manual contained crude diagrams of military convoys and instructions on which parts of the convoys to attack for maximum impact. It also contained tips on how to build suicide bomber vests to take out more lives.

¶5. (C) Administrator Tandy suggested that the best way forward in Afghanistan involved targeting the highest value drug traffickers and their enterprises. After all, they are the ones who promote the cultivation of opium poppy and provide funding for Taliban activities. They are becoming Taliban themselves and fomenting official corruption. Tandy related that she had met recently with a district government official in a village in Helmand that formerly was a ghost town with empty market places. Now, the town has transformed into a vibrant village with markets full of people. The official advised that ridding the town of drug traffickers would help the situation greatly. Many "fence sitters" in town were still deciding whether to support legitimate authorities or the insurgency. Those who saw traffickers operating with impunity would more likely support the Taliban. Tandy argued that taking out major drug traffickers benefited the military. Indeed, on 19 different occasions, intelligence stemming from counter-drug investigations led to the thwarting of attacks using remotely-propelled grenades or improvised explosive devices. Arresting corrupt officials also removed individuals who posed problems to the military, even though they did not constitute traditional military targets. In one instance seven months ago, a visiting Afghan NIU arrested two officials linked with the Taliban in Kunduz Province and whisked them away to Kabul via MI-17 helicopter. Notably, these corrupt officials remained in jail.

LESS PROGRESS IN PAKISTAN

¶6. (C) Tandy noted less progress in neighboring Pakistan, which she had also visited during this most recent trip. Pakistani police did not conduct counter-drug operations in meaningful numbers, even though the DEA had worked to establish vetted units there. DEA personnel had hoped that frontier guards on both sides of the border would share

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intelligence, but they had seen little evidence of constructive relationships. When she and Ambassador Gray had visited the border region a year earlier, Tandy noted that President Karzai had enthusiastically supported this initiative on cross-border cooperation, but for different reasons than U.S. officials; Karzai, she said, remained convinced that the pilot project would demonstrate Pakistani failure to cooperate.

INCENTIVES TO FARMERS

¶7. (C) Moran expressed appreciation for the briefing, which demonstrated progress on interdiction and arrests of traffickers in Afghanistan. He inquired whether incentives for farmers to grow legitimate alternative crops appeared to be working. According to the report recently released by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC), only one out of ten farmers in the country cultivated opium poppy. He asked how authorities were doing in "winning the hearts and minds" of Afghan citizens? The Ambassador questioned whether the UNODC figure applied specifically to farmers in Helmand, who grew the bulk of the world's opium poppy. Assistant Regional Director Balbo observed that statistics could be used to support both sides of an argument. Nonetheless, he suggested that the best way to win Afghan "hearts and minds" would be to conduct enforcement operations and promote the rule of law. DEA personnel regularly participate in meetings with colleagues directing assistance programs. He understood that a recent agricultural fair in Helmand attracted some 3,000 persons, who appeared interested in growing legitimate crops. That said, he predicted that promoting the rule of law and central government involvement in local communities would ultimately reduce the amount of opium poppy under cultivation.

NEED FOR SUSTAINABLE INSTITUTIONS

18. (C) Feller noted his previous experience with police training in Bosnia and Kosovo. While noting that it was risky to compare experiences in different countries, he suggested that establishing sustainable police and criminal justice systems would be the key to success. He understood that Afghan farmers consistently asked for enforcement operations against drug traffickers and cultivators of illicit crops. For such actions to succeed, institutions needed to be credible. He inquired about President Karzai's recent direct talks with the Taliban, reportedly to encourage them to incorporate themselves into the political process. Administrator Tandy cautioned about difficulties in achieving progress in Helmand Province, which remained an enclave for the Taliban. While she noted that Karzai, as President of a sovereign country, had the right to initiate discussions with the Taliban, he needed to exercise caution. U.S. officials would be interested in being consulted about the content of such discussions, but Karzai had revealed details only to his closest circle of advisors. What was most disturbing was that the Taliban representatives meeting with Karzai were the same ones who fired weapons at allied forces and who used proceeds from opium cultivation to construct a hospital to treat wounded Taliban insurgents. DEA colleagues in Colombia had witnessed a similar situation, when some of the AUC members who negotiated with the Colombian Government and received benefits from their supposed demobilization continued to grow illicit drug crops and engage in violent attacks.

INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER CRIMINAL GROUPS

19. (C) Turner observed that 80 to 90 percent of Afghan citizens remained opposed to any return of the Taliban to positions of authority. He inquired whether "ordinary" criminal elements, in addition to the Taliban, remained involved in drug trafficking activities. Balbo replied affirmatively, noting their corrupting influence. Most citizens wanted to engage in licit livelihoods and wanted

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those who broke the laws to be held accountable for their actions. That said, most people also distrusted Afghan police personnel, whom they perceived as corrupt, particularly within the Ministry of Interior. Training of young police recruits, including training provided by the EU, would help to reverse this perception over time. Unfortunately, most police in Afghanistan remained out-gunned, out-manned, and ill-equipped. Village elders often expressed appreciation for visits by NIU police and DEA mentors to their areas and asked for them to return again to arrest traffickers. The Good Performers Fund also can benefit those who have refrained from cultivating drug crops.

Nonetheless, the central government often lacked the ability to reach out to local officials and assist them. In many jurisdictions, Afghans perceived the central government as a "mirage."

ROLE OF COERCION IN CULTIVATION

110. (C) The Ambassador noted the role of coercion, with drug traffickers and the Taliban employing blackmail and threats to family members of farmers. He had heard during his visit last year to Afghanistan that "the Taliban leads people to poppies" and not the other way around with poppies leading people to the Taliban. Balbo observed that traffickers often loaned money to farmers at the start of the growing season and expected farmers to repay such loans with opium poppy. The farmers used such loans to repair their houses, dig wells, and grow poppies. The Ambassador added that the Afghan police need to be at the "front lines" to prevent such coercion. Feller agreed with the need to prevent the Taliban from employing blackmail. He noted the need for a "joint

strategy" on police training, given the finite numbers of EU police officers that can conduct such training in Afghanistan. Their role is important to help provide visibility as the "face of the criminal justice system." He said the EU would deploy qualified police personnel outside Kabul "as soon as we overcome challenges" to their use at PRT locations. Moran agreed, noting that "rapid deployment" had become the EU's mantra on such operations.

RATIONALIZING SALARIES OF JUDGES AND POLICE

¶11. (C) Moran inquired about the payment of police salaries. He understood that payments had been made to some 60,000 individuals, not all of whom engaged in actual police work. Tandy agreed that officials at the Ministry of Interior had engaged in both ineptitude and corruption on payment of salaries. She lamented that, in some instances, six months elapsed before vetted police officers received their pay. She asked rhetorically how such personnel could be expected to remain honest without receiving their pay checks for six months. Turner noted that both the U.S. and the EU had contributed to the fund for paying the salaries of police. As a complement to work that the Italian Government has done with the judiciary, the EU wanted to examine pay and grading of positions for judges and prosecutions, with incumbents expected to re-apply for their positions based on merit. Currently, judges received as little as the equivalent of 50 dollars monthly.

POPPY-FREE PROVINCES

¶12. Turner observed that the UNODC report described thirteen provinces as free of poppy cultivation. Yet, the report also noted the existence of other drug trafficking activities in such provinces. Balbo acknowledged that there were "lots of carrots but not enough sticks." He described the governors as astute and aware of precisely what the provinces needed to do to attract funding. That said, beneficiaries sometimes abused these privileges.

ARRESTS OF HIGH-VALUE TRAFFICKERS

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13.(C) Bataller expressed appreciation for the briefing, including specifics on the links between traffickers and insurgents. He agreed with the approach of arresting high-value traffickers as part of the way forward in Afghanistan. He inquired how many high value traffickers had been included among the 1,700 individuals arrested. He commended the presentation but noted that its optimism tended to "fly in the face of" overall pessimism from the growth of opium cultivation. Tandy responded that authorities had arrested a number of high value traffickers but did not know the precise number, which would represent a fraction of the overall arrests. The U.S. Government had requested the extradition or surrender of several high-value traffickers, who subsequently underwent prosecution in the States. The central Tribunal in Kabul handled additional high-value traffickers as well, perhaps numbering a dozen overall. Nonetheless, other high-value traffickers continued to operate in Afghanistan, including the largest processor of heroin who continues to function with impunity in a "safe zone" in southern Helmand Province. Balbo noted that DEA personnel were working with ISAF and PRT colleagues to identify additional high-value traffickers to target as part of the process of promoting stability in the regions.

ROOTING OUT CORRUPTION

¶14. (C) Balbo said authorities had arrested several corrupt

police chiefs involved in drug trafficking, with such arrests designed to serve as deterrents to other officials. Tandy cited the arrest of an assistant to the Deputy Minister of Interior. This person remained under intense pressure to reveal information about corrupt activities. To date, the investigation continues. The Ambassador noted corruption as a major problem in the Ministry of Interior. During his visit to Afghanistan, one interlocutor had pointed out to him several other officials in the same room that he knew to be corrupt. Balbo emphasized the importance of using vetted units to go after corruption and drug traffickers. To their credit, members of such units have conducted many investigations, including use of video and audio tapes, and were attempting to make timely arrests. Feller reiterated that the key involved "system change," During his time in Kosovo, he had identified a senior police advisor as corrupt, when he failed a polygraph examination. He had to sideline this advisor to make room for younger, more honest recruits. The international community needed to invest in the development of young police investigators as part of their focus on long-term results.

"MAINSTREAMING" COUNTER-DRUG WORK

¶115. (C) Noting links by drug trafficking with other types of serious crimes, Holdsworth inquired whether officials would allow counter-narcotics police work to become part of the "mainstream" of police activities in Afghanistan. She also asked what risk existed that personnel in the specialized counter-drug units would become overburdened in their work. Tandy responded that DEA did not have a time-table to complete police training and permit autonomous operations. Skills taught to the counter-drug police would be applicable and useful for investigating other types of crimes as well. DEA and Afghan colleagues continued to work hard in developing counter-drug capabilities and in targeting drug traffickers. They had not reached the saturation point, but she would welcome when that day actually arrived. Balbo added that the judiciary remained a critical piece as well. Authorities needed to establish courts in the provinces and to improve the pay of judges, who often received less than army officers did. Dr. Hoehn inquired about the applicability of investigative capabilities to other crimes.

Tandy replied that DEA trained the counter-drug police initially in basic investigations, such as vehicle stops, and gradually incorporated more advanced techniques, such as developing sources, doing briefings, and conducting more complex investigations. Balbo noted that such trained

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counter-drug police represented a "beach head" in the Afghan police sector. Obviously, more trainers and training would be needed. Tandy added that providing extensive mentoring remained a critical component. She expressed hope that counter-drug police would eventually deploy as satellite units to the provinces. Specialized counter-drug training would prove useful in investigating other serious crimes. Police presence would be important, as ISAF officers acknowledged that they could assert control over territory but they could not maintain such control indefinitely. A sustained presence was needed. Balbo noted the critical need as well for establishment of a central database with biometrics information on criminals, insurgents, and suspects with outstanding warrants. Tandy noted the need as well for a system to conduct vetting of personnel at regular intervals after completion of the initial vetting.

UPCOMING DUBLIN GROUP VISIT TO PAKISTAN

¶116. (C) Bataller reiterated the key importance of the role of Pakistan in the region. He inquired why greater success had not occurred there. He noted that the Dublin Group, led by Japan, planned an assessment mission to Pakistan within the next month or so. This visit represented an opportunity to

encourage additional donors to play constructive roles. The Administrator said several factors influenced the lack of effective counter-drug work in Pakistan. Anti-drug forces there had lost their policing side because they had become internal intelligence collection agencies. In the process they lost their counter-drug policing skills and objectives. Even the Pakistani frontier corps did not seem effective. At one border check-point across the way from Quetta, the frontier police had access to a functioning biometrics system but decided not to use it, reportedly because of objections from Afghan citizens in the region who protested its planned use. Yet, such a system would help to identify drug traffickers and insurgents. Balbo noted that many precursor chemicals crossed the Afghan-Pakistan border in mule caravans. Basic testing equipment would help in detecting such chemicals, without which traffickers could not transform opium into heroin. Tandy welcomed the involvement of the Dublin Group in an assessment mission.

MEMBER STATE REPRESENTATIVES RAISE THEIR CONCERNS

¶17. (C) Administrator Tandy met separately with PSC Ambassadors and Deputies from the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Lithuania, Romania, and Estonia. She provided a similar overview to the one reported above on DEA activities in Afghanistan and the region, after which Member State representatives discussed their concerns and asked questions.

The Estonian Ambassador asked about the potential for cooperation between the United States and the European Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL). Tandy stressed the need for well-trained police in the provinces and suggested locating satellite NIUs in some PRTs. Balbo added that, as more police completed training, some of them could be put into specialized entities, such as the counter-narcotics units. He also emphasized the importance of continual vetting of police to ensure that they did not become corrupt. The Lithuanian Ambassador asked about the level of cooperation DEA had received from Pakistan and Russia. Tandy said that Russia has been a good partner, especially on the border with Tajikistan. On Pakistan, she said the Interior Minister was enthusiastic and DEA has attempted to encourage more action by engaging with the Frontier Corps and providing them with training. The Romanian Ambassador questioned whether Uzbekistan was cooperating. Tandy noted that DEA had an office in Tashkent and has tried to put a "security belt" around Afghanistan, as precursor chemicals came from outside Afghanistan. The Spanish Deputy Representative noted that only strong rule of law and enforcement could help the situation in Afghanistan and asked about the Afghan Parliament's involvement and prospects for stronger laws.

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Tandy noted a new law directed at corruption was under discussion and remarked that approval of this law would represent a very positive development. Responding to a final question about the possibility of specialized courts, the Administrator said traditional criminal courts played critical roles, but authorities might wish later to consider establishing drug courts with rehabilitation components, as long as they provided both "carrots and sticks."

COMMENT

¶18. (C) The DEA Administrator's meetings with EU officials in Brussels provided an important opportunity to brief EU colleagues on the drug situation in Afghanistan, particularly to reinforce information by previous high-level visitors on links between drug traffickers and insurgents. Her briefing on progress on building capabilities to conduct drug investigations and prosecutions also provided a welcome contrast to overwhelmingly negative press accounts of drug

developments in Afghanistan. The meeting with Commission and Council Secretariat officials also provided an occasion for relevant EU policy makers and program officers to build a wider network of contacts on Afghanistan issues. As Mission INL Counselor and DEA Assistant Regional Director assisted with introductions before the meeting, we were struck by the number of EU officials who had not previously met, even though they handled related issues within the same EU institutions. END COMMENT.

¶19. (U) DEA Regional Director Russ Bensen cleared this telegram.

GRAY

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